

All You Need is Rope



Bret & Roxy

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All you need is rope

Let's start with the Big Disclaimer:

Rope is not safe

There are ways to make it "safer" but rope play is messing around with things that can cause injury. We're here to help you make your rope play fun, and as safe as possible.

Our only "rule" is to manage risks by keeping safety at the forefront of your mind. Please practice some form of SSC or RACK (Safe, Sane & Consensual or Risk Aware Consensual Kink). We're closer to RACK, but we believe each person will set their own boundaries and limits.

This class is not about advanced topics, it's not about situations where the material characteristics of the rope you use are a substantial part of the safety factor (i.e. – since we're not talking suspensions, or even partial suspensions, rope strength is not as important as it would otherwise be).

Now that that is out of the way, let's have some fun!

What is rope?

Rope is everything... a tool for restraint and control, a means to administer pleasure or pain, a source of fear and surprise, a decoration, a toy...

Why do you want to play with rope?

Rope is Easy

Rope allows you to have fun, to connect with our partner. This is a practical, common sense approach, no dogma, no rules, no rights or wrongs.

There are many schools of thought when it comes to rope, and the simple fact is, if you ask a room of 100 rope tops a question about rope, you're going to get 210 different answers. Even worse, attitudes will vary from, "This is what works for me, your mileage may vary" to "This is the One True Way to do Rope and if you are not doing it this Way, then you are not doing Rope correctly, and what's more you are not safe and you should not be allowed to play."

There are classes and books and videos of how to tie, the mechanics of ties, the names of different knots and ties, the traditions of ties, etc, etc, etc. Is your mind swimming yet?

This class is about throwing out all those schools of thought and getting back to the simple idea of having fun with rope. It's about forgetting the "correct" way to do the Osada Steve Takate Kote #3 and remembering that you are using rope to connect with your partner.

Shibari is great, technique is necessary if you are going to move from tying your honey to the bed to doing all that pretty stuff you see online. But if you get so caught up in the how to of the rope

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that you are no longer connecting to your bottom, we feel you've lost the sense of what rope is really about.

There are lots of details you can get lost in, but we want to offer a simplified understanding of the details that will let you start a rich journey into the world of rope.

If you find you like rope, you'll make many of your own decisions about the details based on your own goals, experiences, preferences and the things you learn along the way.

Rope is Cheap

The most basic rope kit is a safety device, some rope and a partner.

For just under \$40, you can put together a basic rope kit – and you can find it all at your local Big Box Stores like Dom Depot and Wal Mart, and your local pharmacy.

The Basic Kit

- Safety Device – i.e. bandage shears or EMT shears
 - \$5 at your local CVS or Rite Aid
 - This is not the time for a knife. An emergency where you may be rushed or panicked is not the time to be pulling out a wicked-sharp pointy thing. Safety shears are *safe* and *controllable* – they are designed to be rested against the skin to cut bandages or seatbelts.
- Rope – ¼" nylon or nylon/poly blend
 - \$12 to \$15 for a bag of 100'; buy two bags
 - This is going to be adequate for all your bondage needs, and the silky feeling nylon feels nice against the skin.
 - Note, if your bottom is an eel, this stuff may pose a problem.

Making the Kit

- Make a fresh cut (i.e. – cut off the taped end) and tie a button knot (AKA – overhand knot), letting the ends unravel
- Pull five full arm spans of rope and cut, tying another button knot at the end
- Use the first piece to cut and tie four more identical pieces
 - You now have five pieces of rope, each about 25' to 30' long
- Take one piece and cut it in half, tying knots in the new ends
 - You now have four 25' – 30' lengths and two 12' to 15' lengths
- If you have leftover rope – you can cut it to match the longer or shorter pieces
- Simply discard any odd leftover lengths (yes, we said toss 'em – rope blasphemy!)

The reason for the “five arm spans” rather than a specific length:

Most people can work comfortably with this length of rope, whether they are tying Western (single rope) or Japanese (doubled rope) style. Too much longer and you'll start running into the strong knot force, tangling up in what Midori calls “Kitten Top Syndrome”, which inevitably results in rope ends

smacking sensitive spots on the rope top. Too much shorter and it's simply not practical; you do need enough rope to tie your honey to the bed, right?

Using Rope

Rope is typically doubled in Japanese style bondage, and most often used singly in Western (or Damsel in Distress) bondage. Though the second you treat that as a hard and fast rule, you'll see a Japanese-style tie where the rope is split and a damsel in distress with doubled rope. No rules, remember?

Rope works by tension and friction. You can restrain and pull someone very effectively, but it's awfully hard to push them away with rope.

Terminology

Working/Running End – The free end of the rope, the part you're working with.

Standing End – the part of the rope you're not using (opposite the working end).

Bight – U-shaped bend in the rope. In bondage, it's often the midway point in a piece of rope.

Hank – A looped bundle of rope or cordage.

Loop – a fold or doubling of the rope through which another rope, or part of the rope, can be passed to form a knot or hitch. We use these to go around body parts.

Cinch – Tightening of the rope under tension (there is good cinch and bad cinch)

The Knots You Need

Larks Head –



1. Form a bight
2. Pass the other end of the rope through the bight creating a loop

Overhand/Button Knot –



1. Make a loop with your rope
2. Take one end of your rope and stick it through the loop you just made
3. Pull both ends of the rope tight

Half-Hitch –



1. Pass the end of the rope through a ring or around a pole (or another piece of rope)
2. Pass it behind the remaining end of the rope
3. Bring the end back up and pass it through the eye you just formed
4. Pull tight (you've just completed a half-hitch). To create a two-half-hitch, continue:
5. Pass the end of the rope behind the remaining rope again
6. Bring the end back up and through the loop just formed
7. Tighten

A Cuff

Because this is the part that's so hard to remember, where everyone leaves the class, gets home and says, "now how did that thing go again?" The following pictures offer a simple, step-by-step visual of one version of a single-column tie. Do yourself a favor, practice this on your ankle, your partner's wrist or ankle, a stuffed animal or something, to get familiar with it prior to trying to tie your honey to the bed. It's just not sexy to be going back and forth between your partner and a picture book of knots, even if it is a kinky picture book.



1 – Double the rope, using the bight as the working end, and wrap once around the wrist...



2 – Adjust the rope at the working end to wrap a second time around the wrist...

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3 – Pull standing end (now the working end) completely through the bight, allowing the bight to curve up over the cuff.

Tip: Keep one finger between the cuff and the wrist to allow space for...



4 – Pull the working end opposite of the bight, creating a bend in the rope...



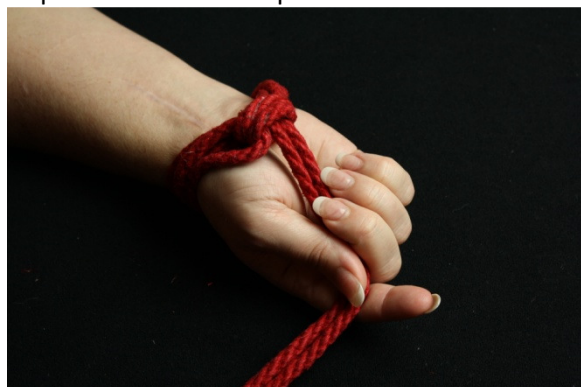
5 – Keeping one finger under the cuff, loop the working end over one finger to cross the cuff, making the shape of 4...



6 – Pull the working end under all the loops of the cuff and back through the loop you created in Step Five. Tip: Keeping one finger under the cuff will help maintain even loops...



7 – Dress (tighten) the knot down onto the cuff, ensuring the cuff loops are even...



8 – Turn the knot to the palm side of the wrist. It's more comfortable for the bottom and puts less pressure on the wrists. If you want to be really nice, tie an over-hand knot in the palm for them to hold onto.

What Can Go Bad?

Really Bad Things

Some really bad stuff can happen in rope, things like falls, shock reactions, and worse that require medical intervention. Don't ever forget that this is possible, and with everything we're about to tell you in mind, *never leave your bound bottom unattended.*

Circulatory and Nerve Compression

Two potential problems with very similar symptoms and one simple cause: rope resting over blood vessels or nerve bundles. One is not a big deal, it will cause some discomfort but is not likely to cause any lingering damage in an otherwise healthy bottom. The other, however, can cause temporary, and sometimes even permanent, complications that include pain, numbness or even paralysis. But which is which? And how can you tell?

The answer to the second question is, for the most part, experience will teach you the subtle differences between the two.

The chart included at the end indicates regions where nerves and blood vessels are likely to be compressed. Yes, it looks like "everywhere" is a potential hot spot. Relax, it's not that bad. Some people will be more sensitive than others, and experienced bottoms will tell you where their hot spots are. For everyone, however, simply be aware of these spots and use caution when applying rope over or near them.

If you've tied a bottom's arms and their hands are going pale, turning grey, blue or purple, it's a safe bet the problem is circulatory. But what if they're going numb? Or tingling?

Circulatory compression will cause color changes, temperature changes – the skin will feel cool or even cold and may be clammy, it can cause a tingling pins and needles feeling or even total numbness. The bottom may say their hands feel cold, swollen, dead or numb, prickly or "weird" (a terribly clinical word, we know). They may also experience a feeling of heat in their hands. Circulatory compression will usually result in the entire extremity going numb (i.e. – the whole hand).

Again, circulatory compression is not exceptionally risky and the best way to deal with it is to slowly release the pressure by moving (or removing) the ropes. We suggest "slowly" because it allows a steady and paced return of blood flow, which will reduce the discomfort the bottom will experience. A sudden change that sends blood rushing back into formerly compressed extremities is likely to have the bottom squirming in pain. And yes, we realize that may be fun to watch.

Nerve compression generally does not cause color change in the skin, temperature changes may be noted but they are minor. The most common feelings are tingling, numbness, a burning sensation and pain. Where circulatory compression hits the entire extremity, nerve compression will often affect only part – perhaps the thumb and index finger, or the pinky and ring finger of the hand.

Nerve compression is potentially dangerous and even short periods of compression can result in significant and lasting discomfort for the bottom. Ropes causing nerve compression need to be moved, or removed, immediately.

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Until a bottom has experienced both circulatory and nerve compression, it may be very difficult for them to know which they are experiencing and the safest course is to treat all symptoms as serious and move the ropes. More experienced bottoms will know what each feels like on themselves and may be able to say things like, “My arm is going to sleep. I’ve got about 15 minutes” or “That’s hurting, could you please move that ASAP.”

If the bottom is complaining about discomfort, tingling, numbness or any other symptom of compression, the first step is to move the rope. It may be as simple as running your fingers under the rope to move it a millimeter up or down. Or, it may require significant changes in the rope’s position, or even removal of the rope.

What to do if:

OK, it happened, your arm (foot, hand, whatever) went numb. And sooner or later, it’s going to happen. Now what?

First step – do not panic. Never panic. Unless your bottom is dead, and even then, don’t panic.

Slowly, carefully, remove the rope. Cutting the rope off is not necessary at this point and if it’s circulatory, we promise the bottom will not thank you as the sudden rush of blood flow will cause rather exquisite pain.

Once the ropes are off, take stock. Is the “sleeping” part waking up or is it still dead? Is the part starting to tingle?

If it’s a circulatory issue, there’s going to be some discomfort as the blood flow returns to normal. If you’re a nice top, a light massage can help. If you’re an evil top, poking, prodding, pinching, etc will increase the squirm factor.

If it’s a nerve compression issue, changing or removing the ropes may fix the problem, and if so, great, no other action is needed. If there is still some discomfort, or if any pain, tingling or numbness persists, drinking plenty of fluids helps, as does resting and icing the damaged part.

Asphyxiation

We all know it, rope around the neck = BAD! Right?

For the record, there are those who engage in breath play – that’s not what this class is about, and we strongly encourage you to not engage in breath play, but for those who want to, please look into how to do it as safely as possible, there are classes for that stuff!

Back to the point, rope around the neck = BAD! But there are other asphyxiation considerations. In its simplest definition, positional asphyxia occurs when a person’s body position prevents their lungs from inflating properly.

Things to be aware of, aside from rope around the neck, are placing your bottom in positions that somehow restrict breathing. That can include rope that is too tightly wound around their middle (think a corset), positions that bend the bottom forward at the waist (hey, some of these ties were invented as

forms of torture, remember?) or that place their neck in a bent position. These things are generally referred to as positional asphyxia.

A bottom who has a case of stuffy sinuses and is then tied face down and gagged may suffocate.

It's simple to prevent, and simple to deal with if it starts happening. Prevent it by being aware of body position and breathing. If the bottom starts feeling short of breath, faint, or lightheaded, it might be a good idea to move them.

Body Mechanics/Joints

Rope can pull and tug on joints. While it's OK to wrap a thick cuff of rope around a wrist or ankle, and then tug on it, doing the same on a joint can cause pain in a bad way. Simple solution – avoid placing rope on the joints, work above or below them.

“No rules” doesn't mean “no thought” – use common sense, and you'll be fine. Remember that not all bottoms are alike. The former gymnast and yoga aficionado you tie one week may be able to stand on one tip toe and scratch her ear with their other foot but the body building football player you're tying the next week may not be able to even clasp his hands behind his back. Talk to your bottom! And bottoms, talk to your tops!

What Else Can Happen?

Rope burn/abrasion

We've all heard of rope burn. It's not fun. Natural fibers can be pulled across the skin more quickly than can synthetics – the synthetics will quickly heat up and cause a nasty case of rope burn. This is truly a case of YMMV – each person's tolerance and body will be different, as will each type of rope and what feels “slow” to one top may feel average or even fairly fast to another. Be aware of the risk, keep your rope moving along the skin at a pace that doesn't cause your bottom to wince in bad pain and try pulling rope across yourself on occasion just to learn what it feels like.

Tops, if your bottom is “following” the rope, if their body is moving along with the rope as you pull, it's likely that you're causing some level of rope burn – slow down!

As a bottom, speak up if it's hurting in a bad way.

Ligatures, Bruises & Petechia

When the ropes come off, there are going to be marks. Serious rope fiends (is “rope sluts” an acceptable term?) enjoy those marks. They crave them. But it's a good idea to know if your bottom can get away with marks that are going to show. If they work in a strict corporate environment and are going to the company picnic the next day, it might be a good idea to keep the ropes off their wrists and ankles.

Ligatures are the temporary, pinkish to red marks that look like rope in reverse. They usually last from a few minutes to several hours, depending on the bottom's skin.

Petechia are little splotchy red spots where the rope laid against skin. They can look like spots, or even lines and can be bright red to dark purple. They may last a few days and are usually caused by pressure on the ropes, or by friction.

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Bruises can happen with rope, and are usually caused by very heavy pressure. Like any other bruise, they may take a couple of weeks to fully fade.

As a top, if you see that your bottom came away from a tie with bruising or petechia, examine the way the tie was constructed for an opportunity to reduce the pressure in those areas. It's likely those spots also had some level of discomfort or pain while the bottom was tied. Of course, you might have intended that...

Important Note

Some people are allergic to natural fibers like hemp and jute, and their skin may flush bright red, they may break out, or get a rash or hives from exposure to certain types of natural rope. If that's the case, switch to synthetics with that partner.

Safety

Intentional vs. accidental pain

There is "good" pain and there is "bad" pain. In rope, there is also "intentional" pain and "accidental" pain. We want to avoid the accidental variety. If you want rope to hurt, it certainly can hurt. But the rope itself should not be causing pain unless the top wants it to cause pain.

If your rope is causing pain, it means the scene will be shorter. You want your bottom to enjoy the scene so they come back for more rope.

Communication

Rope takes two (or more) – a top and a bottom...

From the top:

Communication is a two way street. Talk to your bottom, but also listen. You may find your bottom says they "feel" something is a certain way, but your eyes, experience, knowledge, etc say it ain't so. Remain objective, but listen to their subjective viewpoint. They are telling you about their experience. Don't tell your bottom they are wrong. This is their perception. True, what they feel may not be what is actually happening, but you aren't doing yourself, or them, any favors by saying, "Well, you may say the rope is pinching right there, but I can see that it's not."

Communication isn't all verbal either. Touch your bottom frequently, fingers, arms, body – anyplace that is accessible and not off-limits via negotiation. Watch for changes in temperature, perspiration, response, and even skin texture. Listen to your bottom, listen to them breathe, listen to their vocalizations (whimpers or moans). Look at your bottom, see the colors of their skin, their extremities. Do they look like they are in distress? Is the bottom favoring a particular part of their body, or grimacing at certain movements. Are they following you when you do certain things in order to avoid rope movement or pressure? All of these things are signals that you should listen to. If you aren't intending pain, work to relieve it when you see the signs of it, or the signs of impending problems.

From the bottom (tops should read this, too):

If you feel some discomfort, be it slight or extreme, and think that as a bottom you just have to take it, think again.

It's your responsibility to inform the top of any issues you may have. That may include joint problems, breathing problems, or previous experience with rope, especially if there you had a strong reaction or a negative experience in any way.

It is also your responsibility to communicate that something is hurting to a point of being intolerable, distracting, or whatever your personal limit is. Tops are not mind readers.

Do not worry that the top will no longer want to play. Don't worry that you'll "ruin" the scene. Don't have the, "But I like the rope and I want to stay in it, never mind that I'm bleeding and numb..." mentality. If something hurts in a bad way, that is your body's warning sign and you need to respond to it. The scene doesn't have to be over. I watched a top who had to cut ropes off a bottom, he ensured the bottom was OK and they continued a very hot scene.

Sometimes, all the rope doesn't have to come off. It may be possible to remove only a piece or two, or to rearrange. But it doesn't matter if the scene was 5 minutes or 55 minutes, the goal is for everyone to come out of the scene feeling good about it, not feeling like they never want to do it again.

Sudden fatigue happens, but if you start feeling fatigued, or like you've had enough, try to give the top a heads up. A simple, "5 minutes, Sir" or "My hands are going numb, I'm OK but I'll need this changed soon" will go a long way to making a better scene.

Intense reaction/experience

People have different reactions to being tied. Some immediately love it, some take a while. Some folks love the idea of being tied, and love to escape, others may want to sit and enjoy the rope.

We've seen people have rather intense reactions to rope. We've seen those who can reach orgasm simply from the rope being dragged along their skin. And we've seen one bottom who, when faced with a tie that she could not escape without seriously damaging herself, had a panic reaction. It happens.

Tops, you need to watch your bottom and manage the scene. Keep an eye on them, and be prepared to deal with it if something goes wrong, or they don't feel right.

We've had some experiences where a bottom got very lightheaded during a difficult tie – one time, we had to end the scene and get her out of the ropes; another time, we were able to simply adjust the tie and work with her to get through the "rough patch" and then continue the scene. It's not a "bad" thing if you have to end the scene or make adjustments. It's all part of playing with rope.

If you're new to being tied, or have never been tied in a particular way, you may have some unexpected reactions. Inescapable bondage may make you flip out, or it may make you sink into a quiet, distant place in your head. It might make you tense and want to run away, or it might cause you to feel very secure and safe.

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If during a scene, you start feeling lightheaded, cold, clammy, or like you're going to pass out, it's time to communicate to your top. After a scene, it's not uncommon to get the chills, to feel shaky, weak or tired. Whatever your reaction is, or is not, accept it as your own, don't be shy about getting the aftercare you require to get through it (chocolate is a favorite) and enjoy it as part of the scene. Inform your top of any previous problems or intense reactions you may have had. They will be much better able to help you if they know, "Yeah, I was in that type of tie once and loved it but nearly passed out" instead of being surprised by your eyes rolling back in your head as you sink to the floor.

Emergencies Happen

The number one thing to remember is **do not panic!**

If something goes wrong, assess the problem, then work quickly and methodically to fix the problem and manage the scene. Reassure the bottom that it will be OK. As the top, you can be the difference between the bottom flipping out and the bottom remaining calm in a crisis.

Take control, get help if you need it, reassure your bottom that you've got it handled, and start dealing with the problem.

If you have to cut rope, by all means, cut the rope. But reaching for the shears should be the last course, not the first. In most cases, a controlled release from the rope is better than otherwise. There will always be some person who cites cases where "immediate release" was necessary because ropes were bound around the bottom's neck and they were strangling, or something like that. Use common sense. If the bottom is in distress and could not handle the time it would take you to safely untie them enough to relieve the distress, then cut the ropes. Otherwise, start untying, pronto!

Choosing Rope – Materials , Construction & Care

Remember the adage of asking 100 rope tops about anything and getting 210 different answers? Well, type of rope is one of those areas where you'll get closer to a thousand different answers. Our choices may not be your choices, but here is some basic information to help you along the path of rope.

The bottom line, it's not about what the "cool kids" use. If you want and can afford to splurge on a full set of custom woven silk ropes, then by all means do so. But don't feel that you *must* get whatever the latest, greatest, hottest, coolest rope brand and type is just to have a good scene.

Is the rope you have working for you, your bottom, your scenes, etc? Are you both getting pleasure from working with your rope? Does the *tool* do the job? If so, then great! You've got a working rope kit. If anybody ever looks at you and says "you're not a real rope top unless you've got...", smack 'em and tell them you have Hammer's consent to do so. (kidding!) Seriously, no one else should be telling you what you like. The right rope for you is, well, the right rope for *you*.

We strongly suggest that genuine beginners (those who have never played with rope before) do not make a large investment in their rope... yet. Start out with something simple and easy to afford that won't hurt your wallet if it sits unused. If, however, you try rope out and you fall in love, you may find it's a growing addiction (see Hammer Axioms 1 and 11).

Twisted vs. Braided

Huh, it's not about hemp? This is about construction, not material. There are two typical styles of rope construction – twisted and braided.

Twisted, or laid, rope is formed by coiling three (or more) strands together in the same direction. The fibers within each strand must twist in the opposite direction as the strands in order to produce balanced rope (one that hangs straight and avoids kinking). Most of the natural fiber ropes are twisted. One potential risk of twisted ropes is the partial untwisting of the rope in use. Twisted ropes need to be bound on the ends to prevent unraveling – they can be whipped or tied. Twisted ropes also leave the prettiest ligatures.

Braided rope comes in three broad categories – diamond braid with a core (yarn is woven around a core, similar to wrapping a Maypole), hollow braid, which is diamond braid without a core and solid braid – a very firm and round rope, a fourth type, called a double braid, is a diamond braid where both the core and the rope are braided. Most climbing ropes are a diamond braid with a core, most of the MFP being sold as bondage rope is a double braid of MFP. There are infinite varieties of braids within these categories. Synthetic fiber braided ropes can be wrapped, tied or heated to set the ends to prevent unraveling.

Natural Fibers

Generally speaking, most rope tops do not launder their natural fiber ropes. Though many of them can be laundered in cold water in a lingerie bag, and some can be placed in the dryer, the hassle of the washing, drying and stretching process along with the accompanying fuzzing of the rope and extra wear to an expensive tool makes washing less attractive.

For those concerned with hygiene – there aren't too many creepy critters that will survive a few days of air drying. Any bodily fluids can be rinsed off and the rope laid out to air dry and stretched as needed. Most natural fibers should be oiled after cleaning/processing – jojoba oil is our choice, it's natural, affordable, doesn't go "rancid", has a pleasant smell that doesn't interfere with the rope smell and it's readily available at local stores. Another common choice is camellia oil (tsubaki oil) – which can be more expensive and harder to obtain. It is possible to use mineral oil as well.

Manilla is readily available at hardware stores that sell rope, is cheap, and very strong. However, manila rope is very heavily processed with nasty chemicals to make it impervious to water and oil. It's not good for bondage.

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Hemp	
Characteristics	Hemp has a characteristic smell that many people love; the fiber is very grabby. It softens with use and is widely available both finished and unfinished. Unfinished hemp will require some effort to condition. Natural hemp ranges from pale cream to light tan; it's also available dyed in various colors. Potential allergen
Strength/Stretch	Hemp is technically not rated for load bearing, but is a strong fiber and frequently used in the rope community for suspension work. Holds knots well with little to no slip or stretch.
Feel	The feel of hemp is slightly coarse and scratchy to soft and supple, becoming more "clothlike" with age.
Care & Cleaning	It can be washed in cold water in a lingerie bag and can even be tossed in the dryer – it will fuzz up and it will need to be stretched in the drying process. Best practice: Wash only when needed and air dry.
Cost/Foot	\$0.75/ft - \$1.00/ft processed, \$0.30/ft unprocessed.
Jute	
Characteristics	Jute comes with a distinct grassy smell; newer and unfinished jute may have a distinct oily smell as well that processing and time will remove. It softens and "polishes" with use, becoming very smooth, though it never gets as soft as hemp. Jute is available finished and unfinished, and will require careful processing to condition. Natural jute is a very light golden-tan to light brown; it's not usually available in colors. In addition to smell and touch, jute offers another sensory input – it creaks and groans against itself, like the rigging of a sailing ship (as Hammer says, "It talks to me"). Potential allergen
Strength/Stretch	Like most natural fibers, jute has a grabby feel, holding knots well with little to no slip. Jute is technically not rated for load bearing, but is a strong fiber and is a standard in the Shibari community (the most common Japan is a nylon-reinforced jute).
Feel	The feel of jute is stiffer than hemp, the rope can feel hard even after much use. New jute may feel abrasive but will polish with use.
Care & Cleaning	Jute should not be washed once conditioned unless it is absolutely necessary.
Cost/Foot	\$0.75/ft - \$1.00/ft processed, \$0.30/ft unprocessed.
Cotton	
Characteristics	Very soft, very workable rope with great tooth. Magicians rope has an oval cross section and is often used by DID tops.
Strength/Stretch	A naturally short fiber, cotton is a very poor choice for load bearing. It is also very stretchy (which is why magicians like it so much).
Feel	Soft and cloth-like.
Care & Cleaning	Wash like you would any 100% cotton clothing.
Cost/Foot	< \$0.10/ft

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Sisal	
Characteristics	Widely available and dirt cheap at the hardware store, it is a rough fiber and will often smell very bad. If you're a sadist on a budget, or have an eel that you want to immobilize, sisal is not a bad choice.
Strength/Stretch	Strong fibers, but not rated and should not be used for suspensions (mostly due to uncertain manufacturing processes)
Feel	Rough, scratchy, smelly and coarse, these fibers can shed and "splinter" and if processed with machine oils can lead to nasty infections.
Care & Cleaning	Wash it, boil it, whatever – it's cheap. It will require stretching during or after drying.
Cost/Foot	\$0.02/ft
Flax	
Characteristics	Similar in many respects to hemp, flax is more cloth-like and stronger than hemp, and also has a very distinct odor. It is sometimes sold as "golden hemp" or "dutch hemp."
Strength/Stretch	Stronger than hemp, often employed as rigging in modern day sailing vessels.
Feel	Like hemp in most respects, but can be even softer.
Care & Cleaning	Wash it, dry it, smack it, lick it...
Cost/Foot	\$0.75/ft - \$1.00/ft processed, \$0.30/ft unprocessed.

Other natural fibers include the "exotics" like silk, bamboo, coconut, sea grass, etc, etc, etc.

Synthetic Fibers	
Synthetics can be washed in cold to warm water in a lingerie bag then laid out flat or hung to dry. They do not require any stretching, nor do they require any conditioning prior to use. Ends can be knotted or melted to avoid unraveling and some synthetics are nonabsorbent, allowing for complete disinfection between play partners.	
Nylon	
Characteristics	Resists mineral oils and grease, but affected by acids. Slippery when wet. It does not hold knots as well as natural fibers. Does not take dye well.
Strength/Stretch	The strongest of the synthetics, it will stretch up to half its length. It is, however, rated for load bearing and is excellent for absorbing shock loads. It's not a common choice for suspensions because of its stretch. Not a good choice for tying escape artists because of the stretch factor.
Feel	Silky and soft against the skin, but easily causes rope burn.
Care & Cleaning	Wash in cold water, in a lingerie bag, air only in the dryer, or hang or lie flat to dry.
Cost/Foot	\$0.10-\$0.15/ft, \$0.30/ft dyed
Polyester	
Characteristics	Straight poly is not commonly used in bondage as it is very coarse. Rated climbing ropes are usually a poly outer with a nylon core, yielding a strong, low-stretch rope with a high shock tolerance. The basic poly-nylon blend you can get at Dom Depot is a good choice for all kinds of bondage work if you can use white rope.
Strength/Stretch	Second only to nylon in strength, it has less stretch and will not absorb shock load as well.
Feel	Coarse and "plastic"
Care & Cleaning	Wash in cold water, in a lingerie bag, air only in the dryer, or hang or lie flat to dry.
Cost/Foot	

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MFP (Multifilament-Polypropylene)	
Characteristics	Do not mistake straight “polypropylene” for MFP, totally different critter! MFP is often called “derby rope” and is also common in the boating community. It does not absorb water and will float. It is the most common synthetic fiber in the bondage community. MFP is available in a wide array of sizes and colors (having been manufactured with colored yarns), making it ideal for decorative bondage. Like nylon, MFP will cause rope burn very quickly.
Strength/Stretch	While not as strong as nylon or stretch resistant as polyester, MFP is a good balance of strength and stretch and is a common choice for suspension work. It is more slippery than natural fibers and knots will require extra care.
Feel	Not as silky as nylon, but still soft and supple against the skin. Washing with fabric softener will give it a bit more tooth.
Care & Cleaning	The major advantage of MFP, since it does not absorb liquid, it can be sprayed or wiped with an antibacterial solution to clean/disinfect. Wash in cold, in a lingerie bag, air only in the dryer, or hang or lie flat to dry.
Cost/Foot	\$0.10/ft in volume, \$0.30/ft

Girth Matters

Sure, you could tie someone up with twine, or parachute cord, and if you use a whole lot of it, it may even be reasonably comfortable. Heck, we’ve seen dental floss used for a suspension. Maybe you’re a sadist, or into CBT or BBT. But since this is a 101 type class, let’s stick with the basics, shall we?

Typical thickness in the bondage community is anywhere from 4mm(<3/16”) to 12mm (1/2”), with the most common being 6mm (1/4”) and 8mm (5/16”). Size is a tradeoff between workability, strength and pressure on the body. Thinner ropes are more pliable, easier to twist and bend and work into decorative knots, but they dig into the body. However, they also make smaller knots, which will dig into the body less than a big knot made by thicker rope. Thicker ropes are stronger but stiffer, and they make those big, pokey knots.

The typical logic is: thinner rope = more wraps, thicker rope = fewer wraps. That holds true in many cases, but does come with some other tradeoffs. Truly a case of “Your Mileage May Vary.”

Or you can pull a Graydancer and do the ¾” – 1” thick “Tie ‘em Up and Fuck ‘em” rope. Go ahead, use a single wrap!

Length Matters

Length is pretty much a personal choice. There are some Shibari practices that prescribe a certain length of rope. Every rope top has their own preference and vendors selling pre-cut kits will usually offer specific lengths. What’s the “best” length for you?

We suggest the 5-arm-span length of rope. One thing that will never change when you are working with rope is YOU. You are always going to be the same you. Your bottom may be a 95-pound Japanese model, or a 300-pound linebacker, but your arms will still be the same. A 5-arm-span length is ideal for most applications and is not so long it will get tangled up around your feet.

Other useful lengths would be 12’ – 15’ lengths for shorter pieces and a 50’ length if you do body harnesses or corset ties. A key point to remember:

You can always add more rope!

Where are you gonna buy your rope?

We've already pointed out that you can find a good nylon or nylon/poly blend at your friendly neighborhood Dom Depot or Wal Mart. Heck, if you're really desperate, use clothesline (usually a 3/16" nylon/poly blend or cotton outer with nylon core).

Other sources are listed in the links at the end, you can also check out local kink events. Be aware if you are buying natural fiber rope, you may have to consider finished vs. unfinished and whether or not you are ready to tackle the process of processing rope.

You can, of course, make your own.

And there is always Hammer Axiom #1 – You need more rope!

End Treatments, Storage & Cleaning

If your rope is natural fiber, you can knot it or whip it (instructions available at assorted online sites, or email us we'll send you the how to). Knots have the advantage of making it easy to add more rope: just make a Larks Head in the new piece and tighten it down onto the end knots, voila! More rope!

Synthetics can be knotted, melted (burned), taped or tool dipped.

When it comes to bundling/hanking and storage, you'll hear umpteen different options, including the crochet knot, thumb wrapping, halving, and assorted other techniques. Most rope tops will try just about everything and finally settle on what works for them.

For long-term storage, we suggest loose coils tied by twine to avoid putting excess bends in your rope.

You will have to retire and replace your rope from time to time, depending on how it is used.

Multiple Partners

One question that frequently comes up is how to care for rope when you have multiple partners, or from the bottom's perspective: how do I deal with the top who has tied up other bottoms before me?

Think of it as a sliding scale of safety and squick. At 100% safe, rope is never used on more than one person (a relationship rope) and at 0%, a crotch rope is taken off of one bottom and used as a gag on the next.

Obviously, unless you have two fluid-bound bottoms, the 0% option is just not a good idea. And unless you have unlimited resources and storage, the 100% option is not practical across multiple partners. Since many rope tops don't like tying with someone else's rope – bottoms carting along their own rope kit is not always the solution.

The practical, common sense, no dogma approach: We're not doctors, but everything we know about disease pathways suggests that dry rope is safe – if it came off of the body dry (i.e. – it was tied over clothing) or if it's been laid out to dry completely, any potential contagious factors are either non-existent, or dead. Obviously, rope that is soiled in some way (anything that goes beyond being slightly

dampened by bodily fluids) should be cleaned. Those that are dampened by bodily fluids can be left to air dry. Any damp or soiled rope should be tagged as such and set aside until it can be treated properly.

Some people advocate drying rope in the sun because the inherent UV exposure will kill baddies. Still others will point out that UV exposure damages the rope and shortens its life. We doubt that “reasonable” solar exposure will significantly reduce the life of your rope.

If you’re going to a play party and you will be tying multiple people, either plan on taking lots of rope, plan on tying only over “dry” body parts, or use MFP that you can wipe down between partners.

The squick factor goes outside of safety and everyone’s squick level will be different. Some bottoms will provide their own crotch and gag ropes, others simply trust the top to care for their materials and partners in an appropriate manner.

Making a Scene

Surprise! Rope takes two (or more)! Rope is about the connection between the top and the bottom. As we mentioned before, for some people the rope itself is a scene, but for most people rope is one component of a scene. You still have to use your biggest sex organ – your mind.

We work in two modes: “Lab Mode” and “Scene Mode”. In Lab Mode, we’re working out details, trying for something specific, working on a photo, or something that requires the bottom stays out of subspace and in the here and now. It’s a social state of mind. We still communicate. We still have a good time. But it’s not a “hot scene” in the normal sense. In Scene Mode, it’s a completely different game. The top is in control and it’s all about our connection and the experience of us and the rope. It’s where the bottom can get lost in the ropes.

When you’re playing with rope, it’s important to set an intention, and for both partners to understand it and be on the same page. If the top is thinking, “I want to work out this cool new tie and knot thing I just saw the other night” and the bottom is thinking, “I really need to hit subspace and just let go” – the two are likely to have a less than wonderful experience. Likewise, if the top is thinking, “Ha! I’m going to tie you up and make you come your brains out!” and the bottom is thinking, “hmmmm, I can escape this in less than two minutes” – the top is going to be rather frustrated and the bottom may not have as much fun as they otherwise could have.

Talk about what you want from your rope scene. Discuss where it should go. If yours is a D/s relationship, it may be as simple as, “I am going to tie you and you are going to submit” and the reply of “Yes, sir/ma’am.”

A special little note about those slippery buggers known as “Eels”

Some bottoms like to escape. They have little tricks, and ways, and are often surprisingly flexible. And they can get out of *anything* you put them into. Which is fun. Or it can be. If that’s what you were ready for.

If you are playing with an escape artist, realize they *will* try to get out, unless you give them reasons not to. You can make escape part of the scene, part of the game. Most eels simply cannot resist the urge to escape. It’s possible to tie some eels into a tie they cannot *easily* escape (and they may not like it very

much at all, they may even freak out about it). There are those, however, who it is simply impossible to tie inescapably without harming them.

Be aware of the eels in your life, talk to them about what they want out of bondage and make your scenes work with that.

And if you happen to be an eel, tell your top that. Don't surprise your top with that tidbit by handing them the rope that was around your wrist and getting up just as s/he's about to dive in with the Hitachi.

Based on Experience

A few notes based on things we've learned.

Tops:

- Rope doesn't have to be tight to be effective
 - Tight feels good to some, but may be difficult for others
 - It's possible to do effective bondage without tying super tightly
 - Tighter rope is riskier rope.
- Bodies change shape in different positions
 - Try to tie your bottom in the position you want them to end up in
- Bottoms move and rope rarely stays where you put it
 - Unless you are tying very tightly, rope will move as the bottom wiggles
 - And we all want our bottoms to wiggle, right?
- Use the big hole
 - When tying, look for the larger spaces to pull rope through, then slide into place rather than trying to cram rope into the tiny space between the bottom's arm and their chest.
 - It's a lot easier to pull rope than to push it.
- Order the tie so the hardest or most challenging physical part is tied last and untied first
 - Your bottom will thank you if you tie this way!
- Negotiation with a new bottom should include asking about things that may affect how you tie
 - Back, shoulder, or other joint issues; Circulation issues; Previous injuries; Previous bad experiences in rope; Breathing problems...
 - "Is there anything you don't want me to do/anyplace you don't want me to touch?"
Hammer tip: hope the bottom says "no" to this...

Bottoms:

- Do *not* watch the rope or the top's hands on the rope
 - Rope ends flail about
 - You *will* get smacked in the face by the running end if you watch
- Know yourself
 - Know your abilities and your limits
- Communicate
 - Let your top know of past issues (if any)
 - Likewise if you are feeling especially tight or unflexible
 - If rope is burning, or you are hurting in a bad way
- Don't just "take it"
 - Let your top know (respectfully and within the bounds of your D/s relationship) what's going on

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- Don't ever take the attitude of "I just have to suffer" (unless under orders to do so)
- Give your top a heads up as you start to fatigue – don't wait until you have to get out of that position RIGHT NOW! If your leg is starting to cramp, speak up. A polite, "Five minutes, Sir" or "Ma'am, my arm has gone to sleep" is far better than, "OH MY GAWD, GET ME OUT OF THIS RIGHTNOW!!! AHHHHH! OWWWWW!"

Things to have on hand:

- Water, sports drink or something to rehydrate
- Blanket – even if you don't expect to need it.
- Towels
- Snacks (chocolate is often popular, and chocolate-covered potato chips are gifts from heaven)

Going deeper – Links and Other Resources

Links

- Rainbow Rope - <http://www.rainbowrope.com>
 - They're fabulous, but your best bet is to catch them at an event. They carry MFP and various natural fibers.
- Kinky Rope - <http://www.kinkyropes.com>
 - A variety of natural fiber ropes.
- Vintage Rope - <http://www.vintagerope.com/>
 - They carry jute sold as "japanese hemp", along with a variety of other fibers. They are not currently accepting orders.
- Madame Butterfly - <http://www.butterflyrope.com/>
 - Handmade silk ropes.
- Venus Ropes - <http://www.venusropes.com/>
 - Primarily a nylon vender, died in a variety of colors, they carry hemp and MFP and are frequently at kink events.
- Twisted Monk - <http://twistedmonk.com/>
 - Hemp, hemp and more hemp, some exotics and some really cool metal toys. The gold standard in hemp.
- Maui Kink - <http://mauikink.com>
 - Hemp, jute, nylon, truly evil coconut and sea grass, and some exotics like mohair, bamboo, cashmere, etc
- Knot and Rope Store - <https://www.knotandrope.com>
 - They're not a kink shop, but they do have a lotta rope
- Gentleman Satyr - <http://fetlife.com/users/85647>
 - Custom dyed naturals
- Green Boat Stuff - <http://www.greenboatstuff.com/rotwco.html>
 - Sells flax rope as "dutch hemp" or Langman "premium golden hemp", as well as unfinished Ecolution brand Romanian hemp.
- Michael's – <http://www.michaels.com>
 - Great resource for things like super thin hemp twine, which makes a perfect tool for tying up nipples, or CBT

Learning More

In the Baltimore/DC area there are several options for learning more about rope and bondage. A few interesting options:

- Black Rose Rope SIG – Check with Vibecam on FL - <http://fetlife.com/users/47178>
- Rope Bite Baltimore - <http://ropebite.com/welcome/>
- Bondage Club Baltimore - <http://bondageclubbaltimore.com/>

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Books

Titles we suggest (and yes, these all live on our bookshelves):

Bondage for Sex by Chanta Rose

Available at Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/Bondage-Sex-Chanta-Rose/dp/0977723801>

In our minds, it's the best beginning rope bondage book out there, covering a wide range of rope topics, with good photos and solid advice.

The Seductive Art of Japanese Bondage by Midori

Available at Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/Seductive-Art-Japanese-Bondage/dp/1890159387>

Another good choice for beginner to intermediate, covering the basics of Japanese style bondage and a gentle intro to some of the more complex ties.

Note: if you ever have a chance to see Midori, do so! Her rope dance work is simply stunning!

Shibari You Can Use by Lee Harrington

Available at Amazon: http://www.amazon.com/Shibari-You-Can-Use-Japanese/dp/061514490X/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1286245207&sr=1-3

We can't say enough good things about Lee! Great book, good info.

The Beauty of Kinbaku by Master K

Available at Amazon: http://www.amazon.com/Beauty-Kinbaku-everything-Japanese-suddenly/dp/0615248764/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1286245310&sr=1-1

Visually stunning and full of history.

And of course, there are the Knotty Boys. And Jay Wiseman. And Douglas Kent's Complete Shibari books.

Contact Us

We can be reached via email at roxy.n.bret@gmail.com

Our web page: <http://rhapsodyinrope.wordpress.com>

On Fetlife, we are TheHammer and perfectly_bound – drop us a friend request!

Please feel free to contact either of us with any questions or comments. If we don't know the answer, we will find it, or find out who does know, and we love hearing the perspectives and experiences of others, it helps us learn and improve as well.

Thank you and happy tying!

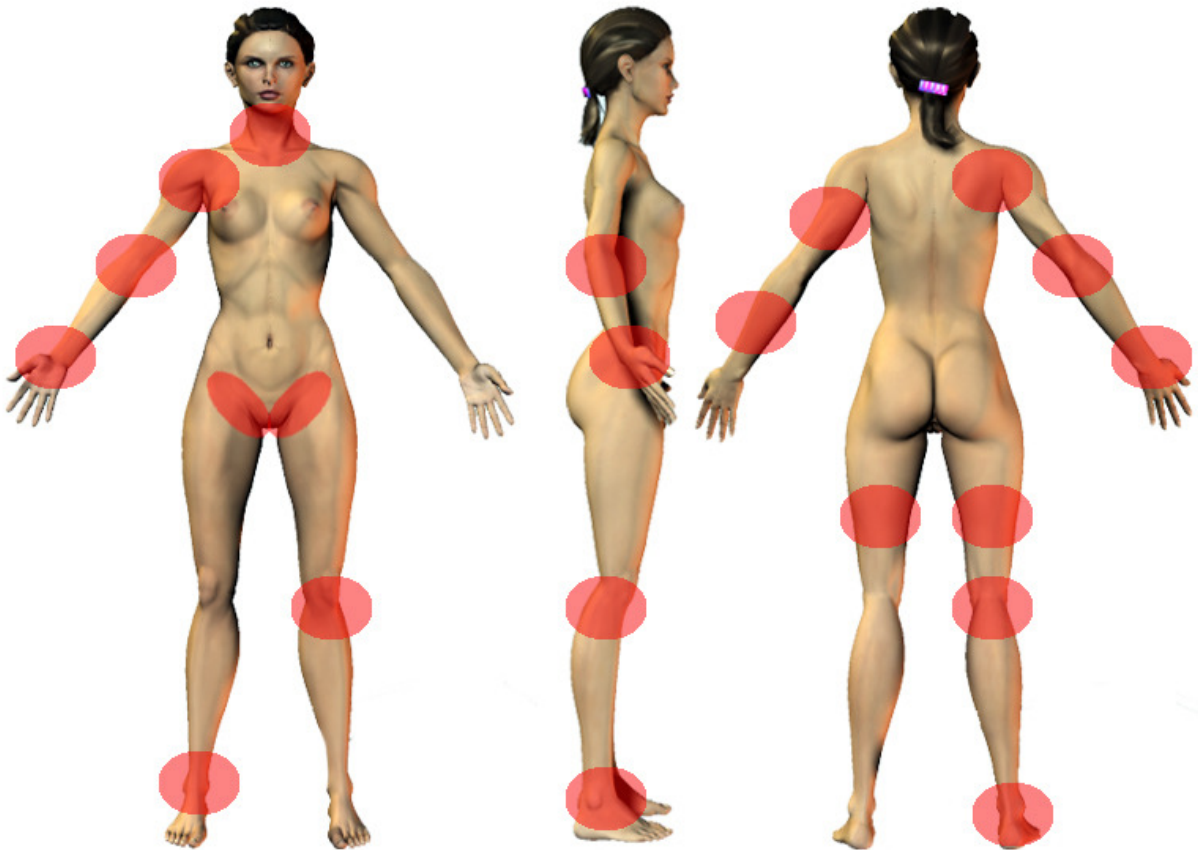
Bret & Roxy

Hot Spots for Circulatory and Nerve Compression Illustration

The following spots are areas where rope may cause problems with constriction, compression of blood vessels or nerve bundles, or asphyxia.

Obviously, tying around the wrists and ankles is common, and many typical Japanese style ties go right over the red spots. This is another case for common sense. Each and every body you tie will be different, and some people may have no problems with rope tied anywhere on their bodies, others may have serious difficulties.

Use caution when working in these areas, particularly around the elbow and upper arm as they are perhaps the most common trigger points for nerve damage.



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This image courtesy of Professor Oni – Lifestyle Images